

Dear Minister Burke,

My name is Laura Feldman and I am the founder of Little Ivory Haus, a creative education business and community supporting aspiring and self-published children's book creators across Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

Over the past several years, through free and paid programs, workshops, events and mentorship, I have helped more than 2,000 everyday people publish their own children's books and delivered creative education to more than 20,000 people.

The creators within our community come from all walks of life. They include mums, teachers, grandparents, allied health workers, First Nations creators, disabled creators, LGBTQIA+ creators and people living in regional communities. Many are sharing stories that traditional publishing pathways may never have the capacity or commercial willingness to support.

These books cover topics including grief and loss, disability, foster care, rare diseases, cultural identity, emotional wellbeing, migration, neurodivergence and inclusion, alongside the joyful and imaginative stories that foster a lifelong love of reading.

Traditional publishing continues to play an important role in Australia's cultural landscape, however the reality is that only a very small number of books are traditionally acquired and published each year. As a result, many important Australian stories and voices are never heard.

Self-publishing, combined with accessible education and digital publishing tools, has fundamentally changed this landscape. It has allowed ordinary Australians to participate in the cultural sector in ways that were previously inaccessible.

This shift should be recognised within Australia's National Cultural Policy.

Independent creators and self-published authors are making meaningful cultural contributions. They are creating books, running events, visiting schools and libraries, building creative businesses and increasing representation for communities that are often underrepresented within traditional systems.

It is also important that creators are empowered to retain ownership of their intellectual property, creative rights and royalties. Many authors and illustrators struggle financially despite contributing significant cultural value, and there remains a widespread belief that creative careers are not sustainable or viable long term.

At the same time, many aspiring creators are vulnerable to exploitative vanity publishing models that charge extremely high fees for substandard services while offering little meaningful support or long-term career development. Despite this, independent creators and grassroots creative education businesses are often overlooked in funding opportunities and policy discussions, despite delivering substantial cultural and community impact.

I would encourage the new National Cultural Policy to formally recognise independent and self-publishing pathways as valuable contributors to Australia's cultural landscape and to ensure that funding, grants and professional opportunities are accessible to creators and organisations operating outside traditional publishing systems.

I would also encourage greater investment in ethical creator education, regional and community-led storytelling initiatives, literacy programs and accessible pathways that empower diverse Australians to participate meaningfully in publishing and the arts without exploitative barriers.

Stories matter deeply. It is important that Australian children see themselves reflected in books and that more Australians have the opportunity to share their stories, regardless of whether they come through traditional publishing pathways or independent ones.

Kind Regards,

Laura Feldman